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**1961/06/13**

JCS OBJECTION TO

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CLASSIFICATION: DATE

JURIS CONCURRENCE

STATE ~~NSC~~ EYES ONLY

CIA HAS NO OBJECTION TO

DECLASSIFICATION AND/OR

RELEASE OF CIA INFORMATION

IN THIS DOCUMENT AS SANITIZED

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Memorandum No. 1

NARRATIVE OF THE ANTI-CASTRO CUBAN OPERATION ZAPATA

13 June 1961

MAR 22 2000

NO OBJECTION

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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No Objection  
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I. Development of the Concept and Plan

1. Although the Cuban situation had been the subject of serious study in the Special Group\*, Central Intelligence Agency and other Government agencies since 1958, this study takes as its point of departure the basic policy paper, "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime," approved by the President on 17 March 1960. (See ANNEX 1) This document, developed by the Central Intelligence Agency and indorsed by the Special Group, provided a program divided into four parts to bring about the replacement of the Castro regime by covert means:

- a. The creation of a responsible and unified Cuban opposition to the Castro regime located outside of Cuba.
- b. The development of means for mass communication to the Cuban people as a part of a powerful propaganda offensive.
- c. The creation and development of a covert intelligence and action organization within Cuba which would be responsive to the orders and directions of the exile opposition.
- d. The development of a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerrilla action.

2. Since the primary purpose of this study is to examine the paramilitary actions growing out of this program and its successive modifications, the paragraph referring to the paramilitary aspects of the plan is quoted in its entirety:

"d. Preparations have already been made for the development of an adequate paramilitary force outside of Cuba, together with mechanisms for

\* The Special Group, sometimes called the 5412 Committee, consists of a Deputy Under Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Director, Central Intelligence and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and meets weekly to consider covert operations conducted by the CIA under the authority of NSC 5412/2.

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the necessary logistics support of covert military operations on the island. Initially a cadre of leaders will be recruited after careful screening and trained as paramilitary instructors. In a second phase a number of para-military cadres will be trained at secure locations outside of the United States so as to be available for immediate deployment into Cuba to organize, train and lead resistance forces recruited there both before and after the establishment of one or more active centers of resistance. The creation of this capability will require a minimum of six months and probably closer to eight. In the meanwhile, a limited air capability for resupply and for infiltration and exfiltration already exists under CIA control and can be rather easily expanded if and when the situation requires. Within two months it is hoped to parallel this with a small air supply capability under deep cover as a commercial operation in another country."

3. It is apparent from the above excerpt that at the time of approval of this document the concept of paramilitary action was limited to the recruitment of a cadre of leaders and the training of a number of paramilitary cadres for subsequent use as guerrillas in Cuba.

4. The CIA began at once to implement the decisions contained in the policy paper on 17 March 1960. A target of 300 men was set for the recruitment of guerrillas to be trained covertly outside the United States. Radio SWAN was installed on Swan Island and ready for broadcasting on 17 May 1960. (See ANNEX 2) Steps were taken to develop the FRD (Frente Revolucionario Democratico) as the Cuban front organization composed of a broad spectrum of Cuban political elements other than Communists and Batistianos. (See ANNEX 3) On August 18th, a progress report was given to the President and the Cabinet, at which time a budget of some \$13 million was approved, as well as the use of Department of Defense personnel and equipment. However, it was specified at this time that no United States military personnel were to be used in a combat status.

5. Sometime in the summer of 1960 the paramilitary concept for the operation began to change. It appears that leaders in the CIA Task Force set up

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in January 1960 to direct the project were the first to entertain the thought of a Cuban strike force to land on the Cuban coast in supplementation of the guerrilla action contemplated under the March 17, 1960 paper. These CIA officers began to consider the formation of a small force of infantry (200-300 men) for contingency employment in conjunction with other paramilitary operations, and in June began to form a small Cuban tactical air force. Eventually it was decided to equip this force with B-26 aircraft which had been widely distributed to foreign countries including countries in Latin America.

6. There were ample reasons for this new trend of thought. The air drops into Cuba were not proving effective. There were increasingly heavy shipments of Communist arms to Cuba, accompanied by evidence of increasingly effective control of the civilian population by Castro. The Special Group became aware of these adverse factors which were discussed repeatedly in the Committee meetings during the fall of 1960. The minutes of the conferences indicate a declining confidence in the effectiveness of guerrilla efforts alone to overthrow Castro.

7. In this atmosphere the CIA began to implement the new concept, increasing the size of the Cuban force in training and reorienting the training toward preparation for its use as an assault force on the Cuban coast. On November 4th, CIA in Washington dispatched a cable to the project officer in Guatemala describing what was wanted. (See ANNEX 4) The cable directed a reduction of the guerrilla teams in training to 60 men and the introduction of conventional training for the remainder as an amphibious and airborne assault force. From that time on, the training emphasis was placed on the assault mission and there is no evidence that the members of the assault force received any further preparation for guerrilla-type operations. The men became deeply imbued with the importance of the landing operation and its superiority over any form of guerrilla action to the point that it would have been difficult later to persuade them to return to a guerrilla-type mission. The final training of the Cubans was done by 38 U.S. Army Special Forces personnel under

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Lt. Colonel David Crowe who arrived on January 13 in the training camp in Guatemala where 400-500 Cubans had been assembled.

8. As mentioned in paragraph 5 above, in order to prepare for this operation, the CIA had been obliged early to organize a task force for planning the operation, and then later was to adjust that organization to the execution phase. (See ANNEXES 5 & 6) In both phases the task force commander, Mr. J. D. Esterline, reported upward through Mr. R. M. Bissell, Deputy Director, Plans to General C. P. Cabell, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and the Director, Mr. Allen Dulles. The latter, while accepting full responsibility for the operation, generally did not inject himself into military operational matters.

9. During the early months of the development of the plan, the Director, CIA looked to the 5412 Committee (Special Group) for guidance and approval of his covert plans for Cuba. In the period December 10, 1960 to February 8, 1961, former Ambassador Whiting Willauer and Mr. Tracy Barnes of CIA were charged with keeping the President and the Secretary of State informed. By the end of January following the change in administration, the President assisted by a restricted group of advisors from the National Security Council took over the function of approval and the 5412 Committee tended to recede from a position of responsibility. However, the Director of Central Intelligence continued to keep the Committee informed of the covert aspects of the plan.

10. The Director of Central Intelligence briefed the President on the new paramilitary concept on 29 November 1960 and received the indication that the President wished the project expedited. The concept was formally presented to the Special Group on December 8, 1960. At this meeting, Colonel Jack Hawkins, USMC, in charge of the paramilitary section for the Cuba project, described the new concept as one consisting of an amphibious landing on the Cuban coast of 600-750 men equipped with weapons of extraordinarily heavy fire power. The landing would be preceded by preliminary air strikes launched from Nicaragua against military targets. Air strikes as well as supply flights would continue after the landing. The objective would be to seize, hold a

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limited area in Cuba, maintain a visible presence, and then to draw dissident elements to the landing force, which hopefully would trigger a general uprising. This amphibious landing would not entirely eliminate the previous concept for infiltrating guerrilla teams. It was expected that some 60-80 men would be infiltrated prior to the amphibious landing.

11. The Special Group was also briefed on the quality of the Cuban force in training in Guatemala. Lt. Colonel Frank Egan, the Army officer on duty with CIA in charge of training, described the superior characteristics of the individuals, particularly as to motivation, intelligence, and leadership qualities. He expressed the opinion that such a force would have no difficulty inflicting heavy casualties on a much larger militia force.

12. There is no evidence that the Special Group formally approved this plan at the time but the CIA representatives were encouraged to continue in its development. A comment was made at the meeting that the existence of the U.S.-backed force of Cubans in training was well known throughout Latin America.

13. During this period the CIA Task Force headquarters for the project was developing a detailed operation plan to support the new concept. It is referred to in this study as Operation TRINIDAD, named after the Cuban town on the southeast coast which was to be the site of the amphibious landing. On January 11th, Ambassador Willauer representing State and Mr. Barnes of CIA first discussed with representatives of the Joint Staff the over-all problem of effecting the overthrow of Castro. As a result, a working committee including representation of CIA, State, Defense, and the JCS was formed to coordinate future actions in pursuit of this objective. At this meeting the TRINIDAD Plan as such was not discussed.

14. At about this time, the change in the national administration produced a break in the continuity of the development of the plan. On January 22nd, several members of the new administration including Mr. Rusk, Mr. McNamara, Mr. Bowles, and Mr. Robert Kennedy were introduced to the Cuba project at a briefing at the State Department. General Lemnitzer and Mr. Dulles were also

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present. A Joint Staff concept was presented by General Lemnitzer of the U.S. directed or supported actions in ascending order necessary to overthrow Castro.

15. Early in January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that there was need for an over-all United States plan of action for the overthrow of Castro and produced a paper, JCSM-44-61 (See Annex 7), in which they recommended the institution of an interdepartmental group to consider various courses of action in ascending degree of U.S. involvement, which, after approval by the President, would become an over-all plan to be supported by subordinate plans prepared by the agencies concerned. This recommendation reached the Secretary of Defense, but appears to have been lost in the activities arising out of the change in administration.

16. On November 18, 1960, President-elect Kennedy had first learned of the existence of a plan for the overthrow of Castro through a call on him at Palm Beach by Mr. Dulles and Mr. Bissell. He received his first briefing on the developing plan as President on January 28 at a meeting which included the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Assistant Secretary Mann, Assistant Secretary Nitze, Mr. Tracy Barnes, and Mr. McGeorge Bundy. (See ANNEX 8) After considerable discussion, the President authorized the following:

a. A continuation and accentuation of current activities of the CIA, including increased propaganda, increased political action, and increased sabotage. Continued overflights of Cuba were specifically authorized.

b. The Defense Department was to review CIA proposals for the active deployment of anti-Castro Cuban forces on Cuban territory and the results of this analysis were to be promptly reported to the CIA.

c. The State Department was to prepare a concrete proposal for action with other Latin American countries to isolate the Castro regime and to bring against it the judgment of the Organization of American States. It

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was expected that this proposal would involve a commitment of the President's personal authority behind a special mission or missions to such Latin American leaders as Lleras, Betancourt, and Quadros.

17. Following this meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook to evaluate Plan TRINIDAD in the form developed by the CIA up to that point. The Chiefs approved and forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 3 February 1961, JCSM-57-61, "Military Evaluation of the CIA Paramilitary Plan - Cuba." (See ANNEX 9) The evaluation was summarized in paragraphs 1 p and 1 g as follows: "In summary, evaluation of the current plan results in a favorable assessment, modified by the specific conclusions set forth above, of the likelihood of achieving initial military success. It is obvious that ultimate success will depend upon political factors, i.e., a sizeable popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces. It should be noted that assessment of the combat worth of assault forces is based upon second- and third-hand reports, and certain logistic aspects of the plan are highly complex and critical to the initial success. For these reasons, an independent evaluation of the combat effectiveness of the invasion force and detailed analysis of logistics plans should be made by a team of Army, Naval and Air Force officers, if this can be done without danger of compromise of the plan. Despite the shortcomings pointed out in the assessment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that timely execution of this plan has a fair chance of ultimate success and, even if it does not achieve immediately the full results desired, could contribute to the eventual overthrow of the Castro regime."

18. Because of the feeling of lack of direct knowledge expressed by the Chiefs, it was decided to send a team of three officers from the Joint Staff to examine and report on the military effectiveness of the Cuban Expeditionary Force at its Guatemala base. This visit was made in the period 24-27 February and resulted in a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (See ANNEX 10) which included the estimate that because of the visibility of activities at Retalhuleu in Guatemala and Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua, the odds against surprise being achieved was about 85 to 15. The JCS air evaluation pointed out that if surprise were not achieved, the attack against Cuba would fail, adding that one

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Castro aircraft armed with 50 caliber machine guns could sink all or most of the invasion force. The Joint Chiefs in approving this report on 10 March 1961 commented to the Secretary of Defense that, "Based upon a general review of the military portion of the plan, an evaluation of the combat effectiveness of the forces and an analysis of the logistics plan from a military standpoint, since the small invasion force will retain the initiative until the location of the landing is determined, the plan could be expected to achieve initial success. Ultimate success will depend on the extent to which the initial assault serves as a catalyst for further action on the part of anti-Castro elements throughout Cuba." The Joint Chiefs of Staff in their forwarding memorandum to the Secretary of Defense recommended that, "A military instructor experienced in the operational logistics be assigned to the training unit immediately for the final phase of the training." Such an officer, Lt. Colonel Ray Wall, USMC, was dispatched from Washington and remained with the CEF (Cuban Expeditionary Force) for some time, assisting in correcting some of the logistics deficiencies previously noted by the inspection team.

19. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the TRINIDAD Plan as one having "a fair chance of success" the plan encountered difficulties in other quarters. From its inception the plan had been developed under the ground rule that it must retain a covert character, that is, it should include no action which, if revealed, could not be plausibly denied by the United States and should look to the world as an operation exclusively conducted by Cubans. This ground rule meant, among other things, that no U.S. military forces or individuals could take part in combat operations. In due course it was extended to exclude pre-D-Day air strikes in support of the landing since such strikes could not have the appearance of being launched from Cuban soil before an airstrip had been seized by the landing force. This effort to treat as covert an operation which in reality could not be concealed or shielded from the presumption of U.S. involvement raised in due course many serious obstacles to the successful conduct of the operation which will be the subject of subsequent comment.

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20. The President and his advisors were thoroughly aware of the difficulties of preserving the covert character of an operation as visible as a landing on a hostile shore and from the outset viewed the TRINIDAD Plan with caution. In particular, the State Department representatives opposed features of the plan because of the difficulty of concealing U.S. participation and also because of their fear of adverse reactions to the United States in Latin American countries and in the United Nations. They objected in particular to the conduct of any tactical air operations unless these aircraft were either actually or ostensibly based on Cuban soil.

21. On the other hand, working to overcome this reluctance to approve the TRINIDAD Plan was the need to decide quickly what to do with the Cuban Expeditionary Force. The President was informed that this force must leave Guatemala within a limited time and that, further, it could not be held together long in the United States if it were moved there. If the decision were taken to disband the force, that fact would soon become known and would be interpreted as a renunciation by the U.S. of the effort to free Cuba from Castro. Faced with two unattractive alternatives, the President and his advisors asked the CIA to come up with various proposals for the use of this force as alternatives to TRINIDAD.

22. These proposals were the subject of detailed consideration on March 11th when the President and the National Security Council met to consider the various plans then being entertained for Cuba. Mr. Bissell of CIA presented a paper entitled, "Proposed Operation Against Cuba" which summarized the action to date and presented four alternative courses of action. (See ANNEX 11) It concluded by recommending the TRINIDAD Plan which he described to be an operation in the form of an assault in force preceded by a diversionary landing as the action having the best chance of achieving the desired result. The assault in force was to consist of an amphibious/airborne assault with concurrent (but no prior) tactical air support, to seize a beachhead contiguous to terrain suitable for guerrilla operations. The provisional government would land as soon as the beachhead had been secured. If initial military operations were successful

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and especially if there were evidence of spreading disaffection against the Castro regime, the provisional government could be recognized and a legal basis provided for U.S. logistic support.

23. The military plan contemplated the holding of a perimeter around a beachhead area. It was believed that initial attacks by the Castro militia, even if conducted in considerable force, could be successfully resisted. The scale of the operation, a display of professional competence and determination on the part of the assault force would, it was hoped, demoralize the Castro militia, cause defections therefrom, impair the morale of the Castro regime and induce widespread rebellion.

24. After full discussion of this plan the President indicated that he was willing to go ahead with the over-all project, but that he could not indorse a plan so "spectacular" as TRINIDAD. He directed that the CIA planners come up with other alternative methods of employing the Cuban forces. An acceptable plan should provide for a "quiet" landing, preferably at night, without having the appearance of a World War II type amphibious assault. The State Department requested that any beachhead seized should include an airfield capable of supporting B-26 operations, to which any tactical air operations could be attributed.

25. During the period 13 - 15 March the paramilitary staff of CIA worked intensively to devise a plan or plans having the desired characteristics, and presented a briefing to the JCS Working Group late in the morning of March 14. They produced for consideration three such alternatives as general concepts. They were based on three possible landing areas: (1) The Preston area on the north coast of Oriente Province; (2) the south coast of las Villas between Trinidad and Cienfuegos; and (3) the eastern ZAPATA area near Cochinos Bay.

26. On March 14th these three alternatives were referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their evaluation. The Joint Staff prepared this evaluation, the results of which the respective Service action officers presented to their respective Chiefs prior to the JCS meeting on 15 March. At this meeting,

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following a briefing by the Joint Staff Working Group, the Joint Chiefs approved the evaluation and reported to the Secretary of Defense that of the three, the ZAPATA concept was considered the most feasible and the most likely to accomplish the objective. They added that none of the alternative concepts were considered as feasible and likely to accomplish the objective as the TRINIDAD Plan. (See ANNEX 12) This preference for the TRINIDAD Operation seems to have been overlooked in the subsequent consideration of the plan by some of the senior civilian officials, including the Secretary of Defense to whom the views of the Chiefs were addressed.

27. An important question developed in the course of this study is the extent to which the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the ZAPATA Plan as it finally took form. The action on March 15th merely indicated a preference for the ZAPATA concept as opposed to the two other concepts considered (neither of which was the original TRINIDAD Plan.) However, the record is clear (See ANNEX 13) that the Chiefs subsequently took active part in considering changes to the plan as it developed into final form, did not oppose the plan and by their acquiescing in it gave others the impression of approval. They considered the plan as a body four times after March 15th while the plan was in the formative stage, but did not review the plan in its final form because of the shortness of time between the submission of the plan to the JCS, April 15, and the actual landing. While individual Chiefs gave it considerably more personal attention than the above record suggests, they did not and probably could not give the plan the same meticulous study which a commander would give to a plan for which he was personally responsible. Also, individual Chiefs had differing views as to important aspects of the operations which in turn differed from those held by senior civilian officials.

28. On the same day as the Chiefs' action, March 15th, the President was briefed at the White House on the three alternative courses of action which the Chiefs had considered. After full discussion, the President again withheld approval of the plan and directed certain modifications to be considered.

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The CIA returned on the following day, March 16th, and presented a modification for the landing at Zapata which Mr. Bissell considered on balance more advantageous than the TRINIDAD Plan, wherein there would be air drops at first light instead of the previous day in the late afternoon, with the landing in the night and all the ships withdrawn from the objective area by dawn without completing the unloading at that time. The President authorized them to proceed with the plan, but still without giving it his formal approval.

29. As the TRINIDAD Plan developed, the question of air strikes became a matter of extended discussions. On January 4th, Colonel Hawkins wrote a memorandum to the Chief, WH/4 (Mr. Esterline) entitled, "Policy Decisions Required for Conduct of Strike Operations Against Government of Cuba." (See ANNEX 14) The paper includes the statement, "The Cuban air force and naval vessels capable of opposing our landing must be knocked out or neutralized before our amphibious shipping makes its final run into the beach. If this is not done we will be courting disaster." The memorandum further recommended that the air preparation commence not later than dawn on D-1 and that a maximum number of aircraft be employed for this purpose. The State Department consistently resisted this kind of air preparation because of its "spectacular" nature and because of the inability to attribute pre-D-Day strikes to airplanes in Cuba. They also opposed the use of jets, although former Ambassador Whiting Willauer, who with Mr. Tracy Barnes monitored the plan in the period December 10 - February 8, 1961 at the request of Secretary of State Herter, had pointed out the need for jet cover to protect the landing in discussions of the Special Group in January. It was felt that the range of jets would obviously require them to operate from U.S.-controlled bases and hence could not be brought within the requirements of non-attribution.

30. In the end a compromise was reached with regard to the air plan. Early in April, it was decided to stage limited air strikes on D-2 at the time of a diversionary landing of 160 men to be made in eastern Cuba. These strikes were for the purpose of giving the impression of being the action of Cuban pilots

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defecting from the Cuban Air Force and thus support the fiction that the D-Day landing was receiving its air support from within Cuba. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not favor these D-2 air strikes because of their indecisive nature and the danger of alerting prematurely the Castro force. Mr. Bissell of CIA also later stated at a meeting on April 6 that CIA would prefer to conduct an all-out air strike on the morning of D-Day rather than perform the D-2 defection strikes followed by limited strikes on D-Day. Nevertheless, the political advantages led to their inclusion in the plan but with the realization that main reliance for the destruction of the Castro Air Force must be placed on the D-Day strikes.

31. At the time of the meeting with the President on 16 March, preparations in the field were proceeding on the assumption that the landing would take place. The President agreed to this procedure but reserved the right to call off the plan even up to 24 hours prior to the landing. He approved the establishment of an interdepartmental working group to carry forward the work begun in January (see paragraph 13 above) and to assure closer coordination within the Executive Branch. On 23 March this working group produced a paper containing agreed tasks prepared by the Joint Staff for assignment to the various agencies of the Federal Government. (See ANNEX 15) This paper was the first successful action to formalize the interdepartmental coordination which up to this point had depended largely upon ad hoc committees and meetings at Presidential level. Because of the high security classification of the operations, few if any records were kept at these meetings and decisions were rarely in written form. Papers bearing on the operation were normally distributed at the start of a meeting and gathered up at the end.

32. Initially, the ZAPATA Plan had a D-Day of 5 April. By 29 March it was apparent that no such D-Day could be kept and the President on that day advanced it to 10 April. This date later became infeasible for political reasons so that it slipped again to 17 April, the date of the actual landing.

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33. On 12 April an important conference took place with the President, the Secretary of State, the JCS, and other NSC officials, in which Mr. Bissell of the CIA presented a paper which outlined the latest changes in the ZAPATA Operation, including the defections, the air strikes on D-2 and D-Day (See ANNEX 16), and the following timetable:

D-7	Commence staging main force - staging completed night of D-5
D-6	First vessel sails from staging area - last vessel departs early morning D-4
D-2	B-26 defection operation - limited air strikes
D-2	Diversionary landing in Oriente (night of D-3 to D-2)
D-Day	Main landings (night of D-1 to D) - limited air strikes. Two B-26's and liaison plane land on seized air strip.
D to D+1	Vessels return night of D to D+1 to complete discharge of supplies.
D+7	Diversionary landing in Pinar del Rio.

The President did not give final approval to the plan at this meeting. However, he was informed that the decision could not be delayed much longer as the no-go time for preliminary operations would be 12 o'clock Friday, 14 April, and for the main landing, 12 o'clock Sunday, 16 April.

34. Colonel Jack Hawkins, USMC, went to Puerto Cabezas to attend the final briefing of the Brigade and battalion commanders of the CEF. (See ANNEX 17) While there, on 13 April he was asked for a final evaluation of the quality and readiness of the Brigade. He replied in most enthusiastic terms (See ANNEX 18), praising the combat readiness of the Brigade and the Cuban Air Force, and expressing confidence in the success of the project. His views were circulated in Washington and reached the President.

35. Meanwhile, the ships of the invading force were approaching Cuba. The first operational event scheduled to occur was a diversionary landing 30 miles east of Guantanamo by a group of 160 men planned for the night of 14-15 April. The landing failed to take place, probably because of weak leadership on the part of the Cuban officer responsible for the landing. This failure may have

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had a considerable affect on the main landing as the diversion was intended to draw Castro's forces to the east and confuse his command.

36. At dawn on 15 April, the D-2 air strike took place against three Cuban air fields, a total of eight B-26's being employed for the purpose. Initial pilot reports indicated that 50% of Castro's offensive air was destroyed at Campo Libertad, 75% - 80% aircraft destruction at San Antonio de Los Banos, and that the destruction at Santiago included two B-26's, one DC-3, one Lode-star and one T-33 or Sea Fury. Subsequent photographic studies and interpretation have assessed a greatly reduced estimate of the damage, amounting to five aircraft definitely destroyed and an indeterminable number of other planes suffering some damage. The attacking force lost one aircraft and crew to antiaircraft fire.

37. At about mid-day on D-1, 16 April, the President formally approved the landing plan and the word was passed to all commanders and officials involved in the operation. The frame of mind at that moment of the senior officials responsible for the approval of this operation seems to have been about as follows. It offered what appeared to be a last chance to overthrow Castro by Cubans before the weapons and technicians acquired from the Communists and repressive internal measures would make the task too hard without overt U.S. intervention. It was recognized as marginal and risky, but the Cuban Brigade, if not used quickly, would become a political liability, whereas used in a landing it might achieve important success before Castro became too strong. Even if unable to hold the beachhead, something would have been accomplished as the Brigade could turn guerrilla and provide a strong reinforcement to the resistance movement in the island.

38. CIA authorities had developed an elaborate propaganda program (See ANNEX 19) to support the military action against Castro. This was based on the use of the clandestine radio SWAN, the programs of 11 CIA controlled radio stations and extensive leaflet drops. The program was executed as planned, except for the D-day leaflet drops for which no means of delivery

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was available. The plan had been to drop the leaflets from B-26's and other aircraft involved in the support of the landing, but the military situation did not permit the diversion of effort. The content of the propaganda program was developed and approved within CIA.

39. There is no evidence of any effort at any higher level to guide and coordinate the over-all propaganda effort. In particular, the United States Information Agency was left in the dark with regard to the operational plans. On 5 April, Mr. Edward R. Murrow, Director of the United States Information Agency heard from a New York Times reporter that operations were underway for a landing in Cuba, backed and planned by the CIA. The reporter indicated that the Times had a very full story on the operation which, however, they did not intend to print but he did hope to persuade USIA to authorize briefings of the press in Miami following the landing. (See ANNEX 20)

40. Armed with this information, Mr. Murrow called on the Director of Central Intelligence who informed him that preparations were indeed underway, but did not give him details of the magnitude or the time of the landing which, indeed, had not been determined at that time. Under the terms of the interdepartmental coordination paper referred to in paragraph 31 above, the Department of State undertook to provide policy guidance beginning D-3 to the USIA in support of the plan, but this guidance was apparently not given. Hence, word of the landing received over the wire services on D-Day caught the USIA unprepared and without guidance.

41. In parallel with its propaganda program, the CIA had continued and accentuated activities directed at stimulating political unrest in Cuba and harassing the Castro government. These actions included such things as clandestine broadcasts in Havana utilizing dormant TV channels, the infiltration of small provocateur groups equipped with printing presses and radios, the development of additional agent and guerrilla assets within the island, and the penetration of pro-Castro organizations. By the time of the invasion, the CIA had effected [REDACTED] the Communist Party, [REDACTED] student organizations, [REDACTED] periphery of the Communist Party and [REDACTED] the 26 July Movement. (b) (1)(c)

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42. With regard to agent, guerrilla, and dissident assets, the pre-invasion reports differed somewhat but suggested considerable strength. (See ANNEX 20 A, Cuban Internal Situation 18 May 1961, and ANNEX 20 B, Map showing agents and assets) It had been estimated by the CIA that from 2500 to 3000 persons supported by 20,000 sympathizers were actively engaged in resistance in Cuba, and that some 25 per cent of the Cuban populace would actively support a well-organized, well-armed force which was successful in establishing a stronghold on the island. At a CIA briefing on April 3, the view was expressed that the percentage of the Cuban population opposed to Castro at that time was much higher than the foregoing estimate, but that many would probably remain neutral until there was a strong indication of which side was winning.

43. At about 9:30 P.M. on 16 April, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, telephoned General C. P. Cabell of CIA to inform him that the dawn air strikes the following morning should not be launched until they could be conducted from a strip within the beachhead. Mr. Bundy indicated that any further consultation with regard to this matter should be with the Secretary of State.

44. General Cabell, accompanied by Mr. Bissell, went at once to Secretary Rusk's office, arriving there about 10:15 P.M. (See ANNEX 21) There they received a telephone call from Colonel Jack Hawkins who, having learned of the cancellation of the D-Day strikes, called to present his view of the gravity of the decision. General Cabell and Mr. Bissell then tried to persuade the Secretary of State to permit the dawn D-Day strikes. The Secretary indicated that there were policy considerations against air strikes before the beach-head airfield was in the hands of the landing force and completely operational, capable of supporting the raids. The two CIA representatives pointed out the risk of loss to the shipping if the Castro Air Force were not neutralized by the dawn strikes. They also stressed the difficulty which the B-26 airplanes would have in isolating the battlefield after the landing, as well as the heavier scale of air attack to which the disembarked forces would be exposed. The Secretary of State indicated subsequently that their presentation led him

~~SECRET~~~~EYES ONLY~~~~NO SPREAD~~

~~EYES ONLY~~

to feel that while the air strikes were indeed important, they were not vital. However, he offered them the privilege of telephoning the President in order to present their views to him. They saw no point in speaking personally to the President and so informed the Secretary of State. The order cancelling the D-Day strikes was dispatched to the departure field in Nicaragua, arriving when the pilots were in their cockpits ready for take-off. The Joint Chiefs of Staff learned of the cancellation at varying hours the following morning.

b5. Realizing the seriousness of this cancellation, the CIA officials set about to try to offset the damage. The invasion force was informed, warned of likely air attacks and the ships told to expedite unloading and to withdraw from the beach by dawn. A continuous cover of 2 B-26's over the beach was laid on. General Cabell arranged with the JCS to alert the fleet to a possible requirement for air cover and Early Warning destroyers. At 0430, he called on the Secretary of State at his home, reiterated the need to protect the shipping and by telephone made the request to the President. The request for air cover was disapproved <sup>but</sup> the Early Warning destroyers were authorized, provided they remained at least 30 miles from Cuban territory.

## II. The Battle for the Beachhead, D-Day to D+2

(See ANNEX 22 entitled, "Sequence of Events D-2 to D+2 and Organization and Operation of the Command Post"; Operation Maps 1-3; and ANNEX 23, Colonel Beerli's Memorandum of 26 April 1961.)

D-Day

## Blue Beach

46. The ships in which the Cuban Expeditionary Force was embarked reached the objective area generally on time in the night of D-1 and the morning of D-Day. At Blue Beach the Brigade Commander, Jose Perez San Roman, went ashore at 0115 and immediately commenced the unloading of troops and supplies. (See ANNEXES 24, 25 and 26) The landing was discovered at once by local militia, some firing occurred, and the alarm was transmitted to troop and air headquarters throughout the island. In view of the situation, it was decided to

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give up the planned transshipment of the force earmarked to Green Beach and to put this force ashore at Blue Beach.

47. Castro's forces, though tactically surprised, reacted with speed and vigor. At dawn they began air attacks against the shipping and the beaches. In spite of these attacks, all vehicles and tanks at Blue Beach were unloaded from the LCU's by 0730, and all troops were ashore by 0825.

48. At 0930 an enemy Sea Fury hit and sunk the freighter RIO ESCONDIDO, which carried in it 10 days' supply of ammunition for the Brigade and other valuable supplies. All crew members were rescued and transferred to the BLAGAR.

49. In the face of continuous air attacks, at 10 o'clock Captain Rydberg, the contract skipper in charge of the shipping, radioed CIA Headquarters that if jet air support were not immediately available, the ships would put out to sea. By this time, not only had the RIO been sunk at Blue Beach, but the HOUSTON had been hit at Red Beach. CIA Headquarters approved the movement of the vessels to the south which began at once. The freighters ATLANTICO and CARIBE preceded the two LCI's and three LCU's which followed the cargo ships at a slower speed imposed by the presence of the LCU's.

50. After landing, the troops ashore pushed out from the beach as planned. Parachutists of the First Battalion dropped at 0730, seized the important road center of San Blas 10 miles northeast of Blue Beach, and established outposts to the north and east to cover the routes of ingress into the beachhead. They were quickly reinforced by the Third Battalion and a heavy weapons (4.2 mortars) detachment. They made contact with Castro forces in the afternoon which pushed back their outpost situated to the east. Starting at about 1700 and intermittently thereafter, San Blas was under attack from forces coming down the road from the north.

51. Radio communications within Blue Beach were non-existent during the entire operation. In going ashore, the troops had been obliged to wade through fairly deep water with the result that most of the portable radios got wet and never functioned thereafter.

~~YES ONLY~~~~ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED~~

~~SECRET~~~~EYES ONLY~~Red Beach

52. The Second Battalion at Red Beach ran into militia units almost immediately upon landing, but cleared them from the beach area. The landing of the Battalion was slowed down by motor trouble with the aluminum ships' boats which were the only landing craft available. Out of nine, only two boats were usable for the 20-minute run from the HOUSTON to the beach. The Fifth Battalion which was to follow the Second never did get ashore, partly because of the boat troubles, partly because of lack of initiative on the part of the Battalion Commander. Very few supplies were got ashore, other than those carried by the Second Battalion while debarking.

53. At daybreak, Red Beach was attacked by enemy aircraft, and at about 0630 the HOUSTON was hit. Somewhat later, the ship went aground on the west shore of the Bahia de Cochinos about five miles from the landing beach. At that time it still had on board about 180 men of the Fifth Battalion who landed but never got into the fight at Red Beach. Later, many worked their way south to be picked up on the swampy keys by the U.S. Navy after the operation. In this air attack, the LCI BARBARA J was also damaged by machine gun fire which disabled two of its engines, and a near miss, which caused it to take water. The damage to the BARBARA J was not reported to CIA Headquarters until the next day at about 1700.

54. After cleaning up the beach area, the troops of the Second Battalion pushed north about four miles but soon encountered militia forces which prevented them from reaching the southern exit of the road across the swamp which they were to block. Fighting went on astride the road throughout the day, enemy tanks appearing in mid-afternoon and enemy artillery becoming active at about 1800.

Air Action

55. The parachute drops made by 5 C-46's and one C-54 took place at 0730 on D-Day. Indications are that the drops were reasonably accurate but considerable ammunition was lost near San Blas. The parachutists north of Red Beach apparently landed in the presence of the enemy and were not heard from thereafter. A total of 172 parachutists took part in the drops.

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~~EYES ONLY~~~~AMERICAN INFORMATION CENTER~~

~~SECRET~~~~SECRET~~

56. B-26 aircraft rotated over the beachhead through D-Day, sank one gunboat, and made effective strikes against enemy ground troops at Red Beach, inflicting several hundred casualties, according to report. In all, a total of 13 combat sorties were flown on D-Day, in the course of which 4 B-26's were lost to enemy T-33 action. In the same period, the Castro air force lost 2 Sea Puries and 2 B-26's to antiaircraft fire.

57. Impressed by the ease with which the T-33 aircraft could destroy the obsolete B-26 type aircraft, the CIA leaders decided to attempt, by a bombing attack, to destroy the remaining Castro aircraft at night on the ground. Six aircraft were scheduled to strike San Antonio de los Baños, believed to be the main base of operations, in two waves of three each during the night of 17-18 April. The mission was flown but was unsuccessful because of heavy haze and low clouds over the target.

58. Because of the developing shortage of ammunition in the beachhead at the end of D-Day, an air supply drop was arranged consisting of four C-54's and two C-46's. Of these drops, five were successful, but in one case most of the supplies drifted into the water from which only a part could be salvaged.

D+1

59. During the night of D-Day-D+1, the invasion shipping departing from the landing area for the south proceeded to a point about 50 miles off the Cuban coast. Here the two LCI's and three LCU's rendezvoused as directed, but the two freighters, the ATLANTICO and the CARIBE continued south without pausing. They did not turn back until intercepted and encouraged to return by the United States Navy, the ATLANTICO some 110 miles to the south, and the CARIBE 218 miles south of the Cuban coast. Thus, the CARIBE was never available for resupply operations while the fight on the beach lasted and the ATLANTICO did not get back to the rendezvous point until 1645 on D+1, 18 April.

Red Beach

60. The troops north of Red Beach came under heavy attack during the early hours of D+1. At 0300 enemy tanks were reported approaching from the north

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and by 0730 the situation was so difficult that the decision was made to move the force to Blue Beach. This movement began at 0900 and was completed about 1030. By that time, ammunition was low in the Red Beach force, but casualties, about 20, were comparatively light.

61. After reaching Blue Beach, the retreating force was allowed about two hours of rest, after which they were given additional ammunition and ordered back toward Red Beach in order to block the coast road to the movement of the force with which they had been engaged in the Red Beach area. They encountered this force somewhere west of Blue Beach and heavy fighting ensued. Exactly what occurred is not known, but it is assumed that the invaders eventually succumbed to the superior numbers of Castro forces moving down from the north.

Blue Beach

62. Enemy artillery fire began falling on the troops in the San Blas area at 0400 and continued most of the day. In the absence of radio communication, it was necessary to send officer couriers from the San Blas area to Blue Beach in order to communicate with the Brigade Commander who had set up his command post on the beach. At 0730 Roberto San Roman, brother of the Brigade Commander, went back to the beach for this purpose, reporting the situation around San Blas and seeking information. The Brigade Commander at that time indicated that the situation at Red Beach was critical. In order to cover Blue Beach, he had stationed some of his reserve forces to the east blocking the coast road coming from that direction and others to the northwest to cover the approaches from that quarter.

63. During the day artillery fire and enemy pressure on the San Blas forces compelled a gradual contraction of their position around the town. They attempted a counterattack to the north in the afternoon, but it soon bogged down in the face of superior forces.

64. By the end of the day, ammunition was very low throughout the beachhead. Only M-1 ammunition seems to have been reasonably plentiful, although the commander of the Heavy Weapons Company indicates that he was never out of 4.2 mortar ammunition. He indicates, however, that it was necessary to ration it

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carefully. In spite of the heavy fighting, there appeared to have been surprisingly few casualties among the invaders.

65. In the evening, the Brigade Commander was asked by CIA Headquarters via the BLAGAR whether he wished evacuation. He replied, "I will not be evacuated. We will fight to the end here if we have to."

Air Action

66. On D+1 it became necessary to utilize some American civilian contract pilots to protect the beachhead area because some of the Cuban pilots either were too tired to fly or refused to do so. Six sorties were flown during the afternoon of D+1, attacking a long column of tanks and vehicles approaching Blue Beach along the coast road from the north. The attack was reported to have been very successful with an estimated 1800 casualties inflicted on the enemy and the destruction of 7 tanks. Napalm was used in these attacks, as well as bombs and rockets.

D+2

67. As events turned out, the night of D+1/D+2 offered the last opportunity to get ammunition to the beach. The ATLANTICO had returned from its trek to the south, rendezvousing with the other ships about 50 miles off the coast at 1645 on D+1. It began discharging cargo at once into the LCU's, completing the transfer at 2200, at which time Captain Rydberg reported to CIA Headquarters that the LCI BLAGAR would escort the LCU's to Blue Beach unless otherwise advised. He indicated that his estimated time of arrival on the beach would be 0630, that is to say, dawn on D+2.

68. The BLAGAR began to move northward with the three LCU's, reporting to CIA Headquarters, however, that if low jet cover were not furnished by first light, the Captain believed that he would lose all the ships. Prior to this time he had requested the escort of a U.S. Navy destroyer. At 2145 CIA Headquarters wired the BLAGAR that a destroyer escort was not possible, to which message the Captain replied that if he could not get destroyer escort in and out of Blue Beach, his Cuban crew would mutiny. At CIA Headquarters in Washington these

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messages were discussed and the critical decision was taken to stop the northern movement of the ammunition ships and direct them to rendezvous some 60 miles south of the Cuban coast.

69. The reasons for this decision appear to have been as follows. The CIA leaders in Washington were aware of the liberal amount of ammunition (3 days' supply) which had been taken ashore on D-Day and also of the air drops on the night of D+1. (See ANNEX 27) Further, they had ordered additional drops on the night of D+1/D+2. Considering the climate in which this operation had been planned in Washington, the CIA leaders apparently felt that it was hopeless to ask for either destroyer escort or jet cover for the ammunition convoy. Without this overt U.S. support, it was felt that the loss of the ships would be inevitable if they tried to run in in daylight -- if, indeed, they could get the Cuban crews to make the attempt. Under these circumstances, they felt justified in calling off the sea resupply effort and made no further attempt beyond an arrangement for another air drop to get in ammunition before the final surrender. Except for one C-46 which landed on the Blue Beach airstrip, the attempt to resupply by air was unsuccessful because of enemy control of the air over the beachhead.

70. Although permission was not sought for jet escort for the ammunition ships, Mr. Bissell of CIA sought and received Presidential authority to have the Navy to fly CAP over the beachhead from 0630 to 0730 on the morning of D+2. The purpose of this mission was to allow the B-26's to provide close support to the troops in the beachhead and cover for air resupply. This CAP was flown but, as indicated below, was of no avail.

71. Within the beachhead, the troops in the San Blas area began a general retreat in the morning of D+2. The last message received from the Brigade Commander by the BLAGAR at 1432 read: "Am destroying all equipment and communications. I have nothing left to fight with. Am taking to the woods. I can't wait for you." Units and individuals arriving at Blue Beach shortly thereafter found the Brigade Command Post gone and heavy artillery fire falling in the vicinity. Pressure on the beachhead was coming from the north and the northwest. The last known report

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on the situation indicates that at 1700 Blue Beach was still clear of the enemy. It appears that fighting ceased shortly thereafter and by nightfall resistance in the beachhead had ended.

Air Action

72. On the morning of D+2 American pilots were again used for the protection of the beachhead. The morning sorties were directed to arrive over the beachhead in the period 6:30 to 7:30 A.M. to take advantage of the one-hour period of Navy cover. For an undetermined reason, they came in almost an hour early with the result that two B-26's were destroyed by the T-33's. A total of 7 sorties were flown on this occasion with undetermined results.

73. As indicated above, three cargo aircraft tried to fly in ammunition on the morning of D+2 but were turned back by the presence of enemy air. A fourth C-46, succeeding in landing on the Blue Beach airstrip in the hours of darkness, unloaded ammunition and picked up a B-26 pilot who had been shot down, departing at daylight. (See ANNEX 28)

74. These sorties ended the action of the invasion force which began stand-down activities thereafter with a total of 21 aircraft still in commission. It is difficult to be sure of the losses suffered by the Castro Air Force. The D-2 air strikes positively destroyed 5 Castro aircraft, with undetermined damage to others, and 4 other combat aircraft were destroyed in the beachhead area.

\*75. It may be asked how near the landing ever came to success. Had the ammunition shortage been surmounted, which is to say, had the Castro air been neutralized, would the landing force have accomplished its mission? Considering

\* Admiral Burke and Mr. Dulles consider that there is insufficient evidence to support the conjectures in this paragraph. The well motivated, aggressive CEF fought extremely well without air cover and with a shortage of ammunition. They inflicted very severe losses on the less well trained Cuban Militia. Consequently, it is reasonable to believe that if the CEF had had ammunition and air cover, they could have held the beachhead for a much longer time, destroyed much of the enemy artillery and tanks on the roads before they reached the beach-head, prevented observation of the fire of the artillery that might have been placed in position and destroyed many more of the local Militia en route to the area. A local success by the landing party, coupled with CEF aircraft overflying Cuba with visible control of the air, could well have caused a chain reaction of success throughout Cuba with resultant defection of some of the Militia, ~~and~~ <sup>undermining</sup> the populace and eventual success of the operation.

*AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR*

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~~STRICTLY~~

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~~NO SPYING OR REPRODUCTION~~

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their lack of experience, the Cubans ashore fought well and inflicted considerable losses on the Castro militia while they had ammunition. Contrary to the view held prior to the landing that with control of the air the CEF could have maintained themselves for some time, with the rapid appearance of the vastly superior Castro forces on the scene, the ultimate success of such a small landing force became very unlikely. The limited number of B-26 crews, if forced to continue to operate from Nicaragua, would have been strained to provide continuous daylight air support to the beachhead. An attempt by the landing force to exercise the guerrilla option and take to the hills would have been virtually impossible because of the presence of the encircling Castro forces and of the instructions which the Cuban invasion units had received to fall back on the beaches in case of a penetration of the beachhead. Under the conditions which developed we are inclined to believe that the beachhead could not have survived long without substantial help from the Cuban population or without overt U.S. assistance. Although under these conditions the guerrilla alternative did not exist, with control of the air the CEF might have been able to withdraw wholly or in part by sea.

### III. Involvement of the U.S. Navy

(See Annex 29, Subj: Rules of Engagement Operations "BUMPY ROAD")

76. As originally planned, the only involvement of the U.S. Navy in Operation ZAPATA was the requirement for one destroyer to escort the CEF ships on D-2 and D-1 to the transport area about 3 miles off-shore, and for one LSD to deliver landing craft (3 LCU's and 4 LCVP's) to the transport area. Also, there was the requirement for U.S. Naval air cover over the CEF ships during the hours of daylight on D-1.

77. As the date for the invasion approached, there were numerous discussions of the rules of engagement which would govern the use of Naval units. In final form, the approved rules of engagement allowed the U.S. Naval forces to open fire only if they or the CEF were attacked while under escort, and the escorting destroyers were not to approach within 20 miles of Cuban territory. If it became necessary for U.S. forces to intervene to protect the CEF ships, the

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operation would then be automatically cancelled, and the CEF ships would withdraw to a port to be designated by the CIA. Because of concern over the possible abandonment of the operation as the result of U.S. intervention, the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the request of CIA dispatched the following message on April 13 to CINCLANT, Admiral Dennison: "In summary, hope is that over all operations will not need to be aborted because of U.S. military intervention and to this end CEF prepared to take substantive risks."

78. With the cancellation of the D-Day air strikes and the subsequent landing and combat on the beach, the requirements placed upon the U.S. Navy progressively increased. The rules of engagement indicated above remained in effect until 0422R, 17 April, when CINCLANT was directed by JCS 994221 to be prepared to provide CAP for CEF shipping outside territorial waters and Early Warning for CEF ships. This was an anticipatory action by the Joint Chiefs of Staff while the request was being made to the White House for CAP following the cancellation of the D-Day air strikes. Only the employment of an EW vessel was authorized and these instructions were dispatched to CINCLANT at 0550. The rules of engagement for U.S. Naval forces remained the same, except that the EW destroyers were not to close within 30 miles of Cuban territory (i.e., 10 miles farther away than previously authorized.)

79. At 1530, 17 April, based upon a CIA request which had Presidential approval, the JCS directed CINCLANT to establish a safe haven for CEF ships with U.S. Naval air cover over the CEF ships in accordance with the following restrictions:

- "a. Carrier ship operation no closer than 50 miles from Cuban territory.
- "b. Aircraft shall operate no closer than 15 miles to Cuban territory.
- "c. No more than 4 aircraft on station at one time."

Further, CINCLANT was instructed that the rules of engagement were modified as follows:

"a. U.S. aircraft shall attack if unfriendly aircraft makes aggressive move by opening bomb bay doors when headed towards ship to be protected or start a strafing run on it. Attacks will not be made by U.S. aircraft under any other condition.

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~~SECRET~~~~EYES ONLY~~

"b. No hot pursuit inside the 15 miles line from Cuban territory.

"c. U.S. aircraft ship shall not come up close to unfriendly aircraft except when attacking it.

"d. If unfriendly aircraft is shot down every effort shall be made to hide the fact that such action has occurred."

Note that the above rules of engagement still give a tactical advantage to the attacking Cuban aircraft before they can be taken under fire by the U.S. forces.

80. At 1337R, 18 April, based upon a call from Admiral Burke from the White House, the JCS directed CINCLANT to conduct a photo and visual reconnaissance using unmarked naval aircraft as soon as possible to determine the situation on the beach. The aircraft were authorized to protect themselves from attack and were to take all precautions to avoid being identified as U.S.

81. Based upon a call from Admiral Burke at the White House, the JCS at 1449R, 18 April, directed CINCLANT to prepare unmarked naval planes for possible combat use. The number to be left to CINCLANT's discretion. CINCLANT was advised in this same message that there was no intention of U.S. intervention. These aircraft were made ready but permission was not given to use them.

82. At 1957R, 18 April, the JCS informed CINCLANT of the possibility that C-130 aircraft with U.S. Air Force markings removed might be used for night drops on Blue Beach the night of 18/19 April. These air drops by C-130 were never conducted because the aircraft would have been unable to reach the beach-head prior to dawn.

83. Upon the request of CIA and with the approval of the President after a conference at the White House, the JCS at 0334R, 19 April directed CINCLANT to furnish air cover of 6 unmarked aircraft over CEF forces during the period 0630 to 0730 local time 19 April to defend the CEF against air attack from Castro planes. He was directed to not seek air combat but to defend CEF forces from air attack. Further to not attack ground targets. (Note: The purpose of this CAP was to provide cover to CEF transport and B-26 type aircraft which were due

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ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED~~~~EFNS CINCLANT~~

at the beachhead during this period.) In this same message CINCLANT was directed to be prepared to conduct evacuation from Blue Beach using unmarked amphibious craft with crews in dungarees, and that if the evacuation by U.S. ships were ordered he was to furnish air cover to protect landing craft.

84. At 1157R the JCS confirmed a telephone call to CINCLANT made by Admiral Burke at 1020R upon orders from the White House directing CINCLANT to send two destroyers to a position off Blue Beach to determine possibilities for evacuation. CINCLANT was also directed to fly reconnaissance over the beach to determine the situation. No ground attacks were authorized but active air to air combat was authorized.

85. On 19 April at 1312R, based upon a call from Admiral Burke from the White House, the JCS directed CINCLANT to have destroyers take CEF personnel off the beach and from the water to the limit of their capability; use CEF boats and craft as practicable; provide air cover; if destroyers fired on they are authorized to return the fire to protect themselves while on this humanitarian mission. (Note the reason that amphibious force craft were not used was that PHIBRON 2 had not yet arrived off the objective area.)

86. At 2052R, 19 April, the JCS informed CINCLANT that existing instructions in respect to air and surface protection for CEF ships remain in effect. This was the safe haven for CEF ships 15 miles or more off-shore. No further requirement for an air CAP in the beachhead area.

87. On 20 April, upon direction of the President to Admiral Burke the JCS at 1946R directed CINCLANT:

"a. Take charge of CEF ships and personnel and get them safely to VIEQUES.

Navy on scene Commander can relay message to CEF ships via me.

"b. Conduct destroyer patrols off Blue Beach tonight <sup>for</sup> of possible evacuation of survivors and instruct CO he is authorized to ground his ship if it will facilitate mission. Use of amphibious ship and craft authorized in addition to DD if desired. Repeat patrol tomorrow night approaching area in sight of land but outside gun range prior to darkness. Provide air cover. Rules of

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~~ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~YES ONLY~~

Engagement during patrols same as before." These rules are to open fire only in self-defense.

IV. Exercise of Control in Washington

88. The CIA Command Post for Operation ZAPATA as well as the communications center was in Quarters Eye on Ohio Drive. (See ANNEX 30 - Communications Net) During the operation, the senior CIA Task Force officials, Mr. Esterline, Colonel Hawkins, USMC; Lt. Colonel Gains (USAF) and Captain Jacob Scapa (U.S. Naval officer on loan to the CIA for use as a staff adviser on naval matters) manned the Command Post around the clock, making those operational decisions which they felt within their authority and seeking higher approval from the Secretary of State or the President for those matters beyond their authority. Mr. Bissell and General Cabell, who were immediately available for consultation, were usually the emissaries sent to obtain this latter kind of approval.

89. There was formal and continuous liaison between the CIA Command Post and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was effected by an exchange of liaison officers between the Command Post and the Joint Staff (General Gray.) In addition, the Command Post transmitted messages and selected operational cable traffic to the Joint Staff by telephone and TWX. There was telephone and cable contact with CINCLANT.

90. Within the Pentagon, General Gray had a situation briefing in the Joint Staff at 0730 and 1600 daily which the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, JCS attended. The other Chiefs maintained liaison officers in General Gray's section who kept their seniors informed.

91. The technical performance of the CIA communications net was reported to have been excellent. There was an impressive volume of traffic transmitted over it. Nevertheless, the President, the Secretary of State and others had insufficient knowledge of the situation to react in time and to make the needed decisions. This inadequacy resulted from many factors: the loss of important signal equipment in the sinking of the RIO ESCONDIDO, the wetting of the portable

~~SECRET~~~~YES ONLY~~~~ULTRA-SUPERSENITIVE~~

~~SECRET~~~~EYES ONLY~~

radios carried ashore and the resulting failure of radio communications within the Brigade net ashore, the lack of information on the part of the Brigade Commander himself, and, most importantly, the absence of an experienced American officer or headquarters in the combat area with the responsibility to summarize and present the changing situation to the authorities in Washington.

92. As a result of these factors, the President and his advisors were generally in the dark about important matters as to the situation ashore and were uninformed of the flight of the cargo ships. To clarify the situation, the U.S. Navy was directed to fly a reconnaissance mission over the beach on the afternoon of D+1, reporting about 1900 that there was no evidence of fighting at Blue Beach where the beachhead apparently had a depth of about 10 miles. This was the last indication of the situation ashore which the President received until the following morning when he received the message that the beachhead had collapsed and that men were fighting in the water.

93. In the urgency to obtain reliable information, it was proposed on the morning of D+2 to send an American observer ashore with a radio and Mr. Robertson on the LCI BARBARA J was chosen to go. However, the fall of the beachhead voided the mission.

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DJS OBJECTION TO

MAJ 14 2000

**SECRET**

CLASSIFICATION: DATE

REQUIRES CONCURRENCE

NSC, STATE, DOD, USAID, ETC, DIA, CIA

CIA HAS NO OBJECTION TO

DECLASSIFICATION AND/OR

RELEASE OF CIA INFORMATION

IN THIS DOCUMENT

3/1/00, ver

STATE DEPT. DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW

Retain class'n Change/classify to

Declassify with concurrence of NSC

EO 12958, 25X

IPS/CVR by Chair

Date: MAR 22 2000

13 June 1961

Memorandum No. 2

NO OBJECTION

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

3-30-2000

IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF FAILURE OF THE OPERATION ZAPATA

SUMMARY

*No DIA objection  
per 1/17/00*

1. The proximate cause of the failure of the ZAPATA Operation was a shortage of ammunition which developed from the first day of the landing, April 17th, and became increasingly critical until it resulted in the surrender of the landing force about 1400 on April 19th.

2. There were three primary reasons for this shortage of ammunition. The logistical plan for the landing made ample provision for ammunition with the men and in floating reserve. However, upon landing there is evidence that the Cubans wasted their ammunition in excessive firing, displaying the poor ammunition discipline which is common to troops in their first combat.

3. Far more serious was the loss of the freighters RIO ESCONDIDO and HOUSTON through air attack at about 0930 on the morning of April 17th. The RIO was a particular loss as it had ten days of reserve ammunition on board, as well as other important supplies. The HOUSTON should have been able to land most of its supplies before being hit, but the unloading was delayed by trouble with the outboard motors of the ships' boats as well as by the apparent lethargy of the Fifth Battalion charged with the unloading.

4. The air attack which sunk these ships caused all others in the landing area to put out to sea, as the only available protection in the absence of control of the air, with the order to rendezvous 50 miles off the coast. The freighters ATLANTICO and CARIBE headed south and never stopped until intercepted by the U.S. Navy at points 110 miles and 218 miles, respectively, south of Cuba.

5. The CARIBE was so far away that its cargo, principally aviation supplies, was never available for movement to Blue Beach while the fight lasted. The

- 1 -

**ULTRA-SENSITIVE**

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ATLANTICO, which had considerable ammunition on board, did rejoin the other ships of the expedition at 1816, April 18th, at a point about 50 miles south of the beach and transferred her supplies to the waiting two LCI's and three LCU's for a night run to the beach.

6. By the time the supplies were transferred and the convoy had started north it was too late to hope to resupply the beach under cover of darkness. The convoy commander asked CIA Operational Headquarters, Washington, for destroyer escort and U.S. Navy jet cover without which he believed that he would lose his ships to air attack the next morning. He added that without U.S. Navy support the Cuban crew would mutiny if sent back to the beach.

7. As a result of these messages, CIA Headquarters, feeling that it would be futile to order these ammunition craft to attempt a daylight unloading, called off the mission and the attempt to get ammunition to the beach by sea ended. The President was not requested for specific authority to extend the air cover to protect the ammunition convoy.

8. These causes for the ammunition shortage rested in turn on others which lay deeper in the plans and organization of this operation and the attitude toward it on the part of Government officials. The effectiveness of the Castro Air Force over the beach resulted from a failure to destroy the airplanes on the ground (particularly the T-33's whose importance was not fully appreciated in advance) before or concurrently with the landing. This failure was a consequence of the restraints put on the anti-Castro Air Force in planning and executing its strikes, primarily for the purpose of protecting the covert character of the operation. These restraints included: the decision to use only the B-26 as a combat aircraft because it had been distributed widely to foreign countries; the limitation of pre-landing strikes to those which could be flown from non-U.S. controlled airfields under the guise of coming from Cuban strips, thus eliminating the possibility of using jet fighters or even T-33 trainers; the inability to use any non-Cuban base within short turn-around distance from the target area (about nine hours were required to turn

around a B-26 for a second mission over the target from Nicaragua); prohibition of use of American contract pilots for tactical air operations; restriction on munitions, notably napalm; and the cancellation of the strikes planned at dawn on D-Day. The last mentioned was probably the most serious as it eliminated the last favorable opportunity to destroy the Castro Air Force on the ground. The cancellation seems to have resulted partly from the failure to make the air strike plan entirely clear in advance to the President and the Secretary of State, but, more importantly, by misgivings as to the effect of the air strikes on the position of the United States in the current UN debate on Cuba. Finally, there was the failure to carry the issue to the President when the opportunity was presented and explain to him with proper force the probable military consequences of a last-minute cancellation.

9. The flight of the CARIBE and ATLANTICO might have been prevented had more attention been paid in advance to the control of the ships to include the placing of some Americans aboard. The CIA officer responsible for all the ships involved was a Swedish-American skipper, Captain Rydberg, who was aboard the LCI BLAGAR with no means to control the freighters, or, indeed, to locate them after they disappeared. Only the initiative of the U.S. Navy in the vicinity brought them back to the scene of action. The absence of Americans on board these vessels was an application of the general order to keep Americans out of the combat area. This order had been violated in a few cases, but it was apparently not considered important to do so in the case of the freighters.

10. The lack of full appreciation of the ammunition situation at the end of D+1 in the CIA Operational Headquarters was largely the result of the difficulty of keeping abreast of the situation on the beach, and the location and movement of the ships at sea from the distance of Washington. Also, there was a confidence in the supply of the beach by air which turned out to be unjustified. Had there been a command ship in the sea area with an advance CIA command post on board, a more effective control would have been possible.

11. The Executive branch of the Government was not organizationally prepared to cope with this kind of paramilitary operation. There was no single authority short of the President capable of coordinating the actions of CIA, State, Defense, and USIA. Top level direction was given through ad hoc meetings of senior officials without consideration of operational plans in writing and with no arrangement for recording conclusions and decisions reached.